

Minutes
September 23, 2003
DNR Waterloo Recreation Area
Discovery Center

NRC Policy Committee on Land Management

DRAFT State Parks Boundary Recommendations

PRESENT:

Commissioner Paul Eisele, Chair, NRC Policy Committee on Land Management
Commissioner Keith Charters, NRC Chair
Commissioner Frank Wheatlake
Commissioner Jim Campbell
Director K. L. Cool, DNR
Resource Management Deputy George Burgoyne, Jr., DNR
Forest, Mineral and Fire Management Chief Mindy Koch and Staff, DNR
Parks and Recreation Assistant Chief Lowen Schuett and Staff, DNR
Wildlife Chief Rebecca Humphries and Staff, DNR
Land and Facilities Chief David Freed and Staff, DNR

OPENING REMARKS

Commissioner Eisele called the meeting to order at 10:00 am. The charge of this Committee and their review of all State forest, parks, recreation and game areas were revisited.

DNR Resource Management Deputy George Burgoyne outlined the ownership strategy that was adopted last Spring. In Phase I, Divisions were charged with reviewing existing State forest, parks, game and recreation area boundaries, and submit revised boundary recommendations. State parks boundary recommendations are the first to be presented to this Committee, followed by State recreation and game areas, then State forest boundaries. Before the revised boundary recommendations are adopted, they will be posted on the Department's website to provide an opportunity for public comment. Boundary reviews should be completed by December, 2003. Following the opportunity for public comment and adoption of new boundaries, lands considered non-essential to the Department's mission and long-term management objectives will be reviewed for alternative ownership or partnerships.

Commissioner Wheatlake stated this Committee plans to meet quarterly in 2004 to address recommendations from each Division on lands identified as requiring further action. This will be an ongoing process to run parallel with other Department land activities and strategies.

PARKS BOUNDARY REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

Lowen Schuett, DNR Parks and Recreation Assistant Chief, acknowledged **Gary Jones, Waterloo State Recreation Area Park Manager**, and thanked him for the use of this facility. Chief Schuett commented that the recommendations being presented at this meeting only focus on 77 State parks' boundaries. They will come back to this Committee next month to present recommendations on 20 State recreation areas. He then introduced Parks and Recreation staff that would be making the presentation.

Parks and Recreation presented the existing State park boundaries, the criteria used to conduct the boundary reviews, and their revised boundary recommendations. Recommendations include 23 sites where the

boundaries would not change, 31 sites where there would be limited changes, and 23 sites where they would recommend expanded boundaries. In later phases of their review, they will consider: which lands should remain under public ownership but may be more appropriately managed by a different Division within the Department; lands that could be considered for alternate ownership by other conservation partners or local governments; or lands that should continue to be protected to preserve unique resources, provide public recreation and education opportunities, and maintain their exemplary characteristics, such as historical, wildlife or habitat preservation.

The second phase will include a more detailed review to identify lands that may be considered non-essential, as well as areas to be considered for inclusion within the boundaries. This land review will be conducted over the next year, first focusing on lands in the Southern Lower Peninsula, then the Northern Lower Peninsula, and concluding with the Upper Peninsula.

It was noted that some of the pressures the Department faces with current land ownership include private in-holdings, loss of hunting safety zones and other buffers, the threat of development and loss of waterfront ownership and/or access.

The Committee reviewed and discussed several specific State parks' boundaries under each category, using topographical maps, aerial photos, and plat maps that depicted existing ownership patterns and special features.

Director Cool commented that some of the recommendations for expanded boundaries may include areas that could best be managed for other purposes (i.e.: forestry, hunting, wildlife or habitat preservation) by interagency exchange. He also commented that certain areas may be considered for appropriate categorization based on its characteristics, such as a historical site rather than a State park. Some key partners in this process would include the Michigan United Conservation Clubs, various land conservancies, the US Forest Service, and other federal and State agencies.

Commissioner Wheatlake commented that the Department and this Committee also need to consider the use and value of any land considered for acquisition to ensure they meet the Department's mission and long-term management objectives.

Resource Management Deputy Burgoyne closed the presentation by stating this is just the first phase of the boundary reviews. Department staff will continue to work with other agencies within the Department to prioritize lands to be considered for acquisition, or those that could be managed through interagency transfer, partnerships, or outside organizations. After public comment has been received and recommendations adopted, the Department will move forward on identifying and prioritizing those parcels that we wish to protect, acquire, exchange, partner with, dispose of, or manage differently.

Commissioner Charters and Commissioner Eisele commended Parks and Recreation staff for their presentation and the work involved in gathering this information.

CLOSING BUSINESS

Commissioner Eisele reviewed the strategy plan. All boundary recommendations should be presented to this Committee by the end of November, with State recreation and game areas being presented in October, and forest boundaries in November. Recommendations will then be made available for public comment during normally scheduled Natural Resources Commission meetings before being adopted.

Commissioner Charters commented on the efforts of the Governor's Land Use Council and how it relates to this Committee's review of State land ownership. There is total concurrence that review of the State's ownership pattern was long overdue.

Commissioner Eisele stated the next Land Committee meeting will address State game and recreation areas, to be held in the Bay City area. Details of the meeting will be determined and announced at the October Natural Resources Commission meeting.

Commissioner Eisele adjourned the meeting at 1:30 p.m.